

STAT

14 January 1963

MEMORANDUM FOR: Executive Director

SUBJECT : Suggested Lessons from the Cuban Crisis

REFERENCE : Your memorandum dated 5 November 1962, subject:
Post Mortem on Lessons Learned [redacted]

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1. We have reviewed our experience during the build-up of Soviet military equipment in Cuba and the subsequent Cuban crisis. The performance of course reveals areas of activity in which — at least with the benefit of hindsight — we might have done better. We certainly are studying ways to improve our performance in the future.

2. Before discussing these, however, I want to emphasize my belief that the Central Intelligence Agency is most fortunate in having had the high quality of personnel and broad level of experience demonstrated by the Agency throughout this period. It is also obvious that CIA and the intelligence community had developed organizations and procedures designed to minimize the possibilities of another Pearl Harbor. In effect, we have developed systems for the collection of information, the reporting of indicators, the analysis of current trends, the analysis of long-term trends, and the conduct of basic research which operate independently of one another, supporting each other, so that even if one system might fail, the others will be operating properly to prevent surprise.

3. We have identified a number of points that need further study and action to improve the performance of the intelligence community in future crisis situations, and a brief description of them follows.

4. A large number of key people throughout the intelligence community, and in CIA specifically, were fully committed during the Cuban problem. They worked long hours seven days a week and had no time to devote to other problems. It would be highly desirable for the Agency to develop what amounts to a strategic reserve for use in times of crisis. For example, it might be possible to use JOT's to considerable advantage in such a situation. In any case each component should identify people of proven ability and experience who could be pulled off their normal work for the duration of major crises.

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5. In a fast moving crisis situation, rapid distribution of highly sensitive information becomes terribly important and normal procedures to obtain the release of this information for dissemination or special attempts to restrict circulation of sensitive information cause disproportionate difficulties in the production of current intelligence. It probably would be advisable for us to develop pre-arranged procedures for crisis situations which could be put into effect by the Director on the advice of his principal deputies which would make possible a streamlining of our reporting and analytical activities. Such pre-arranged procedures might also take into account the need to shift personnel described in the preceding paragraph. Within the DD/I we will study this matter. The Deputy Director and Executive Director should do so in a broader context.

6. In addition to the need for streamlined procedures pointed out above, in a fast moving crisis situation there is a heightened need for senior officials to push information down through the organization. In other words, guidance has to move faster and more comprehensively through all levels of the organization in a crisis situation if intelligence production is to be faster and more comprehensive. A specific staff officer assignment should be made at each command level to insure appropriate debriefing and dissemination of information from key officers involved in the crisis.

7. In some cases during a crisis it would be helpful to get periodic negative reports from the field. During the recent crisis, for example, it would have been helpful to get such periodic negative reports from US Embassy, Moscow. The lack of significant new developments there would have been of considerable interest. The Office of Current Intelligence should specifically request DD/P and perhaps State and Defense to lay this procedure on when it would be helpful.

8. During times of crisis a large volume of extremely important intelligence moves through the command channels of US military organizations. There is no simple established way by which such valuable information gets fed into the intelligence machinery. We managed to overcome this problem in large part by ad hoc measures during the Cuban crisis but believe that systematic measures should be developed to insure the availability of such information in a future crisis. We are working on this problem.

9. Many of the people involved in studying the problems of the Cuban crisis have been concerned with the problems that appear to be inherent in our existing system for the reporting and analysis of information from human sources. Witnesses are an extremely important source of

evidence in our work. But just as the testimony of witnesses in a trial often conflicts, we find that the intelligence information obtained from human sources is also conflicting. In thinking about this problem, we believe that our existing system for reporting and analyzing information from human sources has changed relatively little from the early days of World War II. In the meantime, the intelligence community has acquired great sophistication in the collection and analysis of information from non-human sources. We believe that it might be advisable to take a new look at the basic philosophy and implementing procedures involved in the collecting and use of this human source material. Perhaps more systematic evaluation of raw intelligence from all sources by DD/I analysts would be helpful.

10. With respect to the estimates business, one of the main concerns in my mind post-Cuba, I should like to suggest the following steps which I believe would be constructive:

a. On major strategic problems involving crisis situations, estimative writing should, to an extent greater than commonly now true, be made to be:

(1) data-oriented and evidence-oriented rather than abstract and speculative (what the DCI calls "philosophical");

(2) focussed on describing situations and identifying key factors influencing developments rather than purely predictive;

(3) attentive to the nature and consequences of various alternative lines of future developments, including "worst cases," rather than seemingly firm in identifying "most probable" developments when these are by their nature impossible to predict with much certainty.

b. To insure that the DCI is being supplied in timely fashion this kind of estimative writing, as well as current and basic research data he needs, the DD/I should produce balanced, broad-based CIA reports; the Office of National Estimates staff should contribute to this process, and this task should have as high a priority as drafting inter-agency reports for consideration of the Board of National Estimates and the USIB.

c. It should be the responsibility of the DD/I within the Agency to establish the CIA substantive position on strategic intelligence matters of primary importance at the National Security Council level drawing on expert opinion in all of the DD/I offices, and coordinating with DD/P and DD/R as appropriate when CIA substantive assessments are required.

d. To insure close intellectual harmony between the researchers, evaluators and estimates officers, the DD/I should insist on close coordination among all DD/I office staffs, including ONE, and with DD/P and DD/R.

e. The Board of National Estimates might voluntarily or upon invitation contribute to or comment on CIA assessments, but their main task would be the review and approval of USIB papers based on CIA papers and other USIB agency contributions. The Board of National Estimates should as now report directly to the DCI on USIB papers, but the DD/I should advise the Board (and the DDCI or DCI when they consider these papers) of the relationship of USIB texts under consideration to related CIA assessments based on the work of all the offices of the DD/I complex, plus information available from DD/P, DD/R and policy levels of the Government.

f. Appointments to the Board of National Estimates should be on the basis of a two-year term, renewable upon determination of the DCI, and not permanent assignments; the Board of National Estimates should be reduced in size to nine, so that it can more commonly work corporately as a substantive reviewing group rather than in ad hoc panels; and the group should not necessarily always include three retired military officers.

11. Much of what I suggest herein is already standard procedure and in fact is what Agency Regulations call for. An improvement in what I have called the "data-oriented and evidence-oriented" quality of estimates and CIA assessments will be sought by administrative and educational efforts by the DD/I.



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